JOBS FOR NATURE | MAHI MŌ TE TAIAO

Ngahere Manaaki Project Profile

Purpose of this review:

To highlight the positive social, environmental, and community benefits of the Ngahere Manaaki project

Project Summary

The Ngahere Manaaki project was funded to plant native tree species, fence off waterways, and carry out predator control in the Whanganui catchment near Hiruhārama/Jerusalem. The project covers over 80ha of Māori land and protection extends into hundreds of hectares of neighbouring land blocks. The primary goal is to increase the diversity and resilience of regenerating forests, contributing to the broader effort to protect and restore the natural ecosystems within the Whanganui River catchment.

Why is the project important for the region?

The Ngahere Manaaki project is significant to the Whanganui region by supporting the cultural and spiritual connection of local Māori to the Whanganui River, providing economic relief and skill development during the challenging times of the COVID-19 pandemic, and contributing to the environmental health of a critically important natural catchment area.

Region	Manawatū-Whanganui
Recipient	Aorangi Whanau Trust
Start date	13/08/2021
End date	31/07/2024
Approved funding	$477,500.00
Project intent	Capability Development, Ecosystem Restoration, Freshwater Restoration, Pest Control Animals, Pest Control Plants
Funder	Department of Conservation

What difference is the project making to people?

Employment benefits

Six kaimahi have been employed over 3 years, upskilling both on the job and through formal training qualifications. Employees are involved in activities such as planting, maintenance of the planted areas, native nursery mahi, riparian fencing, and predator control. These jobs provide valuable skills and experience

in environmental management and conservation.

Skill development

Participants in the project received formal training in Pest Operations and Operational Skills at Level 3, which includes health and safety and fencing skills. This training not only equips them with the necessary skills to work in environmental management roles but will also support their future employability in sectors such as conservation, agriculture, and land management.

Education outcomes

The training components, as well as the wānanga (cultural education workshops) which are often extended to the local community and kura (school), serve as platforms for both formal ecological education and the sharing of traditional knowledge. These opportunities provide intergenerational connection and are crucial for building long-term capacity within the community to manage natural resources sustainably.

Improved health and wellbeing

The Ngahere Manaaki project has contributed to greater wellbeing in Hiruhārama/Jerusalem. Participation in conservation activities is shown to improve both physical and mental health, which is felt and enjoyed by not only the project's kaimahi but also their families and wider community.

How is the project contributing to the wellbeing of Māori?

The project supports the connection of Māori with land and natural resources, reinforcing their stewardship and guardianship with the environment.

The Whanganui River holds profound cultural, spiritual, and historical significance, particularly for the local iwi (tribes) along its banks. Known as Te Awa Tupua, the river is considered a living entity and an indivisible whole that embodies great mauri (life force) and mana (prestige).[1]

The passion and commitment demonstrated by this whānau in their guardianship serves as an inspiration to others. Their dedication to restoring the whenua (land) is a testament to the power of community-driven environmental stewardship and highlights the importance of reconnecting with the land and water for the benefit of future generations.

Environmental Benefits for the Whanganui River

Improved biodiversity

One of the key achievements has been the extensive planting of 20,000 native trees and plants. This reforestation effort not only contributes to improving and protect the biodiversity of the area but also to carbon sequestration.[2]

The planting of trees and restoration of natural vegetation acts as a carbon sink, thus mitigating climate change. This is increasingly important as New Zealand aims to meet its climate change reduction targets.

The newly established native nursery on-site ensures a sustainable supply of eco-sourced plants for ongoing restoration work.

The project has also focused on controlling invasive species, with 250 hectares now under pest control and 210 hectares under weed control. By reducing the numbers of possums, rats, mustelids, goats, and deer, the project allows native flora and fauna to thrive. This is crucial for maintaining the ecological balance and supporting the regeneration of the forest canopy.[3]

Waterway protection

Fencing has played a vital role in the restoration process, with 15 kilometres of new fencing and 25 kilometres of

maintenance fencing completed. This fencing protects sensitive areas, such as riparian zones and wetlands, from damage caused by livestock and invasive species. By preventing erosion and filtering pollutants, the restored riparian areas contribute to improving the water quality of the Whanganui River and its tributaries, creating healthier habitats for fish and other aquatic life.

The control of pests like deer and goats, which browse on young saplings and undergrowth, allows for the regeneration of forest areas. This regeneration helps in maintaining the forest structure and health, which is vital for many native species.[4]

The Whanganui River's status as a legal person under New Zealand law further highlights the significance of this project. By restoring the land and waterways that feed into the river, Aorangi Whanau Trust is not only contributing to the physical well-being of the environment but also upholding the mana (prestige) and mauri (life force) of the river itself.

References

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4. Ministry for the Environment. (2023). How pests affect our biodiversity and pest control initiatives.

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